

HER INTERESTS ARE VARIED

(The following article about the William J. Powells appeared recently in the Boston Traveler. -- Ed.)

When the William J. Powells moved to the house on Washington St. in Duxbury 17 years ago, tiny vivacious Gerry Powell said:

"That's it, I've done my duty, and I'm going to take it easy now."

She was referring to the civic work she had done in Pittsburgh, Pa., where they lived. . . art shows in New York and Pittsburgh, where she had exhibited her paintings. She was referring, too, to service as vice-president of the Western Division, Federated State Garden Clubs of Pennsylvania, DAR activities, and a few other incidentals involving her talents of singing, dancing, playing the piano and dramatics.

"But I can't help it. I love it and I've kept right on," she said.

Active in two garden clubs and the Duxbury Art Club, Gerry studies ballet when her teacher is in town, continues to paint, does all the work in the backyard garden which she designed, and refinishes furniture for their house.

"My major interest has always been painting," she said seriously. Daughter of artist Helen West, she studied under Frank Deumonde and Remington Arthur.

Since moving to Duxbury, she has studied with Jerry Farnsworth in North Truro, and her painting of the lighthouse there hangs in the Powells' study, once the burning room of the house.

Both Powells take delight in their charming 1826 house and have adopted a new interest--that of restoring and maintaining it in keeping with its 19th century tradition.

"We made as few changes as possible except to restore things as they were," Gerry said. "I got quite a few ideas visiting period houses around the area."

A photograph of the house, taken in horse and buggy days (in evidence in the picture) helped establish architectural details of the original house.

The Powells replaced two elm trees and a white picket fence,

The house, built by shipbuilder Levi Sampson for his son Augustus, who was about to be married, reflects the occupation of its inhabitants. Augustus Sampson was destined to join his father in the shipbuilding business, and five small bedrooms opening off the hallway were provided for apprentices. The three larger bedrooms as they have since been made into suit the Powells' way of life better.

A steep staircase which led from dining room to the second floor, convinced Gerry that "those shipbuilders were used to climbing ropes." This the Powells have exchanged for one from the cellar which is not quite so steep.

Three big chimneys service the eight fireplaces in the house. At one time a smoke oven for curing ham, bacon and fish, made nine.

Gerry, who is an ardent collector, displays her prizes throughout the house. A genuine Ming vase and a very old iron Chinese Buddha preside over the living room bookcase mantle.

"I'm especially fond of Oriental things she confided." Other treasures include a fourth century Egyptian Coptic tapestry and a beautiful old hand-illuminated and hand-painted Koran.

Her large collection of old books includes old herbals, a number of first editions, and some very old books on shells with handpainted illustrations. These she currently displays in her "Florida room," which is devoted to her shell collections brought from Sanibel, Fla., where the Powells go every winter.

They are also long-time fans of Cape Cod. When Powell retired as an official of Equity Life Insurance Co. in Pittsburgh, they decided to come East to be near their son William, Jr., now a doctor, who was attending eastern schools.

"We used to come to Cape Cod anyway, so we thought, why not move East--we love it."

It is notable that the first master of this house, Augustus Sampson, married a direct descendant of Elder William Brewster, the man who gathered the parish for First Parish Church in Duxbury.

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